



*United States Attorney
Southern District of New York*

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U.S. SEIZES PAINTINGS STOLEN FROM ITALIAN MUSEUM

DAVID N. KELLEY, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and MARTIN D. FICKE, Special Agent in Charge, New York, Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, announced today that the Government has seized two paintings by the Italian artist Andrea Appiani (1754-1817) that were stolen from a castle in Italy in the late 1990s.

According to a civil forfeiture Complaint filed in support of the seizure in Manhattan federal court, the paintings, known as Venus and Adonis and Hercules and Omphales, were consigned by a collector located in Los Angeles, California to Christie's in New York for inclusion in its June 17, 2004 old master paintings auction.

The Complaint alleges that prior to their theft, the paintings were displayed in a room on the ground floor of the Brancaccio Castle, a public museum located in the municipality of San Gregorio da Sassola, Italy.

According to the Complaint, the paintings

were reported stolen from the castle on or about June 20, 1999. The police report stated that the theft likely occurred while renovations were being carried out in the castle between 1994 and 1999. According to the Complaint, in or about June 1999, the Italian authorities reported the theft to Interpol.

According to the Complaint, the paintings were estimated by Christie's to sell (together as a lot) for between \$30,000 and \$50,000. Photographs of the paintings were included in the Christie's catalogue for the June 17, 2004 auction. The Complaint alleges that on or about June 14, 2004, authorities in San Gregorio da Sassola confirmed that the paintings as depicted in the Christie's auction catalogue were the ones that had been stolen from the Brancaccio Castle.

At Government request, the paintings were removed by Christie's from the June 17, 2004 auction and thereafter have remained in Christie's custody until yesterday's court filing. The Complaint states that Italian law enforcement authorities have requested the assistance of the United States government in recovering the paintings.

The Complaint seeks the forfeiture of the paintings pursuant to the Cultural Property Implementation Act ("CPIA"), a federal law enacted in 1983. The CPIA provides for the seizure, forfeiture and return of items stolen from a museum of any country which is a member of an international

convention prohibiting the trafficking in illicit cultural property. According to the Complaint, Italy became a party to that convention in 1979.

Mr. KELLEY praised the United States Department of Homeland Security Immigration and Customs Enforcement for its outstanding investigation of this case. Mr. KELLEY also thanked the Italian Carabinieri and Christie's for their cooperation and assistance in this matter.

Assistant United States Attorney EVAN T. BARR is in charge of the case.

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